

# LIFE



## Learning In Florida's Environment



Donald V. Forgione  
Director  
Florida Park Service

### LIFE: Increasing Access to Florida's State Parks

In 2010-2011, the [LIFE program](#) brought more than 4,800 students and teachers – many who had previously never visited a state park – into our public conservation lands. The program is specifically designed to make use of parks during non-peak periods (Monday – Thursday or off season) and promote scientific and environmental literacy. In addition, the LIFE program builds a sense of stewardship among our youth, and it supports one of our agency's top three priorities: Ensuring our residents have more opportunities to enjoy our award winning state parks.

"The Florida Park Service is committed to environmental education as an important part of interpreting *...the Real Florida*<sup>SM</sup> and recognizes the Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) program for systematically engaging middle school students in state parks," said DEP's Florida Park Service Director Donald Forgione. "The LIFE program not only increases access to Florida's award-winning state park system, especially among students who may not typically have the opportunity to explore and learn in these unique places, but also fosters the next generation of stewards to care for Florida's precious natural and cultural resources."



Janet Sweat  
Teacher  
Richardson Middle School  
Columbia County School  
District

### A Transfer Leads to a Second LIFE

Janet Sweat started working with the LIFE program in 2007 at Fort White Middle School. Recently, she moved to a new school in the district which also happens to have a LIFE program. Janet will assume the role of lead LIFE teacher at [Richardson Middle School](#) and her extensive experience has allowed her to hit the ground running. Below, she answers a few questions about the LIFE program:

What do you like most about the LIFE program?

*I love how the students get to go out in the field and complete full labs. This helps the students understand concepts that they struggle with when just reading the textbook. The LIFE program is inquiry at its best.*

What is the strength that you bring to the LIFE program?

*I have worked with the LIFE program for many years at another school so I bring experience. I also have been creating my own labs using the LIFE lab format which gives the students continuity.*

How does the LIFE program support your work as an educator?

*The DEP staff came down and spent a day training me on the labs that I am*

*not familiar with. They have also been generous in offering to help by being there on my first lab experiences with Richardson. They are always willing to work with educators to provide the training we need to make the program successful.*

**Trends You Should Know**

Three national trends are shaping the future of environmental education today. As formal and informal educators, recognizing these trends and what they mean for our programs is crucial to our success.

*Green School Initiatives* have been growing locally and nationally at an accelerated pace over the last three years and highlighted by the establishment of the National Green Ribbon Schools program by the U.S. DOE this fall. In Florida, the DOE and DEP together with other partners recently expanded the [Florida Green School Awards program](#) into the Florida Green School Network.

*Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)* initiatives are also on the rise. [Florida’s STEM Strategic Plan](#) reinforces the importance of programs that address these subject areas and their integration into project-based learning. Again, the LIFE program shares core elements with STEM programs including subject integration, project-based learning and the role of informal education providers.

Finally, *mainstreaming environmental literacy* continues to advance in various forms. Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will likely include some recognition of environmental and outdoor education – currently in the context of promoting a “Well Rounded Education.” Related efforts include the ongoing development of [Next Generation Standards for Science](#), the creation of a [Framework for Assessing Environmental Literacy](#), and the establishment of [Ocean, Earth and Atmospheric Science Literacy Principles](#). In Florida, the development of a State Environmental Literacy Plan is an ongoing effort to better plan and coordinate ongoing efforts around the state.



2010-2011 State Winners of the Florida Green School Award (Student Category)



**Workshops/Events/Conferences/Resources:**

Date	Event	Location
January 23-26, 2012	<a href="#">2012 Florida Educational Technology Conference (FETC)</a>	Orlando, FL
March 29 – April 1, 2012	<a href="#">2012 LEEF 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference</a>	Wekiwa Springs State Park

*The LIFE Program includes 18 sites around Florida. If your LIFE site has an update to share, send it (along with pictures and captions) to Greg Ira at [Greg.Ira@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Greg.Ira@dep.state.fl.us). For more information on the LIFE Program, visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/secretary/ed/lifeprogram.htm>*